The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

No. 25, Vol. iii.] BELFAST, JANUARY 1st, 1883, [For Gratuitous Circulation.

WE beg to remind our readers that it is now high time that the annual subscriptions to the Unitarian Society were paid. Miss Dickson, at the Depository, will be glad to receive the same, and the Committee would be gratified if the amounts were handed in as soon as possible.

WE are now able to judge as to the wisdom of the step we took, nearly a year ago, in removing our Depository, from Donegall Street to the Queen's Arcade. We made the change with hesitation, for our business had grown considerably, especially during the last year. But our friends may now be fully reassured. There has been no falling off in receipts, and quite a new class of persons has been drawn to the Depository. We are not able as yet to give the exact figures, but we may safely say that the year just ended has been, at least, as successful as its predecessor. This gives us great hopes that in the future our Depository will do better still.

ON Monday Evening, November 27th, at the meeting of the Mutual Improvement Association, Mr. W. J. Roche read a thoughtful and interesting paper, on "Law and our dutiful obedience thereto." An animated discussion on the essay ensued, Rev. Mr. Cooper, Messrs. J. W. Robb, O'Neill, W. C. Dobbin, G. Fisher, Jas. Johnston, and the President, taking part.

Monday Evening, December 4th, was devoted to Music and Readings. A varied programme was very efficiently rendered by members and friends to a large and appreciative audience.

On Monday Evening, December 11th, a debate took place on the question, "Should Capital Punishment be Abolished." Mr. F. E. Dale opened the discussion and advocated abolition, and was followed by Messrs. Geo. Fisher, W. C. Dobbin, James Johnston, J. W. Robb, H. Hunter, Thomas M'Clelland, J.P., on the negative side, and Mr. W. J. Roche and the President on the affirmative, after which the opener wound up the debate.

On Monday Evening, December 18th, the President (Rev. J. C. Street), delivered a lecture, on "The Ancient City of Smyrna as seen by a modern traveller." The lecture was an eloquent and descriptive account of the lecturer's visit to the ancient city. A vote of thanks to Mr. Street, for his very interesting lecture, was moved by by Mr. Vere Foster, seconded by Mr. W. J. Roche, supported by Mr. J. R. Neill, and on being put to the meeting was carried by acclamation. Mr. Street having replied it was announced the next meeting of the Association would take place on January 8th, 1883, when a lecture would be delivered by Mr. Max Veital.

ON Friday night, December 1st, an entertainment, consisting of a lime-light exhibition and sacred song, illustrative of the "Pilgrim's Progress," was given in Ravara Meetinghouse. There was a large attendance, the house being well filled in almost every part. The Revs. T. Dunkerley, Comber, and J. M'Caw, Killinchy, were present. Mr. M'Caw presided, he being the first pastor of the church. The programme, creditably executed, gave general satisfaction. A vote of thanks was moved by Rev. W. O. M'Gowan *(pastor loci)*, seconded by Mr. W. J. Scott, and supported by Rev. Henry A. M'Gowan, to all who contributed to render the entertainment a success. A vote of thanks having been passed to the chairman, the proceedings were brought to a close by the choir singing the Evening Hymn and the Chairman giving prayer and benediction. Thanks were accorded to Comber and Killinchy congregations for their pecuniary aid, encouragement, and sympathy, rendered through their several pastors, Mr. Dunkerley and Mr. M'Caw, and also to some members of Moneyrea congregation who kindly assisted the choir. The proceeds will be devoted to the Improvement Fund.

THE Lectures at Rosemary Street have proved as successful as ever during the past month. On December 3rd, the Rev. Christopher J. Street lectured to a large congregation on "Free Will—what it involves," and the remaining Lectures

were delivered by Rev. J. C. Street, on the following subjects:—

"Conversion."

"The Gathering of the Tares."

"Christmas Eve."

"The Story of the Year."

A CONFERENCE of Sunday School Teachers and friends of Sunday Schools, took place in Rosemary Street School-room, on Wednesday, December 6th. Tea was provided. After tea Mr. J. M. Darbishire took the chair. The Rev. T. Dunkerley opened the proceedings with prayer, after which the Chairman delivered a brief address, dwelling upon the importance of Sunday School work, and urging upon Teachers the necessity of careful preparation. He then called upon the Rev. Christopher J. Street, M.A., of Padiham, to read a paper on "The work of Sunday Schools To-day." We print in this issue of the *Chronicle* Mr. Street's paper in *extenso*. At the close of the paper a very interesting discussion took place, in which the Chairman, the Rev. T. Dunkerley, B.A., Miss J. E. Bruce, the Rev. J. C. Street, and the Essayist took part. A vote of thanks to the Chairman concluded the interesting proceedings.

THE WORK OF SUNDAY SCHOOLS TO-DAY.

WE are sometimes told, even by our friends and well-wishers, that the day for Sunday Schools has now gone by. Our education-laws are in a much more satisfactory state than they used to be; and all the elementary instruction, once given in the Sunday School, can now be more easily and thoroughly given in the day-schools which exist only for that purpose, where even the children of the poorest can obtain the rudiments of knowledge without any great difficulty. We are reminded that Sunday Schools were instituted to supply a want which was naturally felt a hundred years ago; and it is pointed out that that want has now been met in a more satisfactory way. When Robert Raikes and Thomas Stocks entered upon the work of Sunday teaching it was with the desire to employ the one spare day in the week for a high and benevolent purpose, viz: to teach poor and neglected children how to read, so that they might be furnished with the means for rising above their miserable condition into a happier and nobler state. Their efforts were met by a continual and bitter opposition, especially from the Orthodox who were horrified at this desecration of the Lord's Day. School teaching on the Sabbath was a thing unheard of in its impiety: the Day of Rest was being profaned by secular work.—But these two philanthropists looked at the question with a very different eye. They saw the ignorance, the poverty, the degradation around them, and were appalled by the wretched picture. Their hearts glowed with intense human love, and went forth in sympathy to their less happy brethren. They felt that if any work was sacred, this task which they undertook must be; and if one day was holier than another, the holiest of all would be the most suitable for their labours. And so they set to work to teach the neglected and raise the degraded; and their patient self-sacrificing and unwearying labours met with their due reward at last. Many a child was rescued from ignorance and shame, and furnished with the means of bettering his own material and moral condition. Many a home was brightened by a gleam of sunshine which found its way where only darkness had been before. Many a blessing and pious prayer followed the plodding efforts of these godly men. And after a while, those who had been so bitter in their opposition to the little movement became converts to its spirit; and gradually the Sunday School became a recognized factor in church life;—till now, what do we see? Go where you will among the Orthodox, you will find Sunday Schools large and flourishing, many boasting of their hundreds of children, and in our own body, though we cannot in most places boast of such numbers, we find that the best and most prosperous of our congregations, those in which a real life is manifested, are provided with the same institutions. Could Raikes and Stock and our own Lindsey arise in our midst to-day, and look around at the mighty result of their simple efforts, would they not thank God for the inspiration which set them on so divine a work?

But in spite of the vast spread of these institutions, we are told that they are out of date. It is true that the immediate needs which the founders of Sunday Schools felt have largely vanished. Thank God it is so! The nation has at last awakened to a sense of its responsibility, and laws have been made which make a rudimentary education possible where it was utterly impossible before. But this is only a step which has been taken within the last few years. Young as I am, I can remember the time when reading and writing were taught in our own English Sunday Schools, nay, for two years I had a class of fifty rough, rude, ignorant lads, whose only instruction (I believe) in these most necessary arts was obtained at the Sunday School. But happily a great change has come over our land since then. Such lads as these would now be brought under the influence of the School-boards, and would receive an education much more thorough and satisfactory than could ever be gained by an hour and a half's lesson given once or twice a week. But even *yet*, *all* the need for such Sunday work has not disappeared, especially in Ireland, nor will it do so, till a rudimentary education free and compulsory, has reached every child throughout our British Isles. Real compulsion has only been very partially applied in England; and (to the shame of the British Government and the British people be it told!) thousands of children are growing up in fair Ireland without instruction in the three R's, nay, without being able to distinguish the letters of the alphabet. We need not be surprised, therefore, if some few of our Sunday

Schools in England and in Ireland still find it necessary to keep to the old system of giving instruction in the rudiments of knowledge. We cannot then give an *unqualified* assent even to the statement, that the time for such instruction in our Sunday Schools has gone by.

But, putting these cases of remaining need aside, and accepting this assertion as true, should we therefore be bound to go the further step and admit that Sunday Schools are now altogether outgrown and useless? To this I answer at once and decidedly; No! Everybody will admit that Sunday Schools *have* been a great boon and done a grand work in past time. They have supplied a want which would have been otherwise unprovided for; and by so doing they have elevated the tone of the nation and made it capable of better things. So far all will go. But I go a step further and say, that this good work of theirs is being *continued* in a natural direction at the present day, and *will go on* ever more and more beneficially, if we only take care to guide it aright.

Here we have in our midst a vast machinery of action, called into being originally for a purpose which is now, happily, nearly outgrown. But the machinery is there still. Still there is the craving and the need for education. Still do the children flock to the Sunday Schools; and are we to meet them at the door some fine morning, and say:—"You need'nt come any more; we have done everything for you that was originally intended by the pious founders?" Putting the matter on its lowest ground, surely this would be a great economical *waste*. If we have materials here ready to hand, why not make use of them? If the Sunday Schools are still crowded, why not continue to work in them, even if it be in a somewhat different direction to that of old? Let us ask ourselves, what is the natural successor of the system begun a century ago? What were Sunday Schools founded for?

TO TEACH THE IGNORANT. Cannot we do that yet? Do the School-boards furnish children with a complete stock-in-trade of instruction, so that they want nothing more to make their way steadily and nobly through the world? Putting aside for a moment the realm of religious teaching, there are many branches of knowledge which are not even touched upon in the public schools, that we could most beneficially introduce into our Sunday School instruction. Children who are bothered with their Standard Readers five or six days a week should not be set down to the same dish on Sundays. Besides reading, writing, and arithmetic, are not the golden key which will unlock all the treasures of earth to him who has them. True, they will do a great deal for him, and set him on the way of self-improvement; but may we not turn our Sunday Schools to account in giving the scholars a little more help in a direction that will prove useful to them in after life? We can store their memories with records of perseverance and industry, exemplified in the lives of great and noble men who have made the world brighter and better by their patient efforts. We can show them the sweep of the world's history and the continuity of human progress, not from any mere petifogging record of the reigns of kings and queens, but from those great books which deal rather with the real life of the world and enter into the true spirit of the people. We can call attention to the claims of Social Economy, dwelling on the sinfulness of waste, the pressing need for making a good use of everything, and the moral demand upon us to make provision for the future. We can lay open the fundamental truths of Political Economy, a true grasp of which enables a man to keep clear of the false and pernicious doctrines too common in all classes at the present day. How madly are working-men misled time after time, because they are ignorant of the laws regulating Capital and Labour; and they almost invariably get the worst of it in the end; yet a few hours sound instruction in the inexorable laws of Political Economy might have kept them right. We can teach the laws of health, and the duties owing to our physical frame, and thereby help to make life better and happier. We can train up the young minds to love the ways of Temperance, by showing them the evils of indulgence in strong drink and by pointing out how we can be healthy, happy, and holy without having any dealings with it. We can point the way to good food, neatness, and order, and good manners, and show how great an influence these have upon the comfort and peace of a household. How true is it, as Charles Lamb says, that "homes there are which are no homes,"—and of such, the worst is that where dirt, disorder, and discord reign. There is plenty of scope for counteraction of all these evils, and such a remedy the Sunday School can supply, if it will. Such tasks as I have lightly sketched may well be undertaken by it, each school of course undertaking that work of which it feels most need; and in devoting heart and soul to these lessons it will be working in the Spirit of Him who laid down the Golden Rule, and following faithfully in the steps of the devoted and kindly men who began the good work.

But is this *all* the Sunday-school may do? Was there not a second object in the original plan? Surely another aim was TO RESCUE FROM DEGRADATION AND SHAME. Well, can we do nothin in this way? On this *line*, it seems to me, lies the most important function of the Sunday-schools of the present day. Though the day for purely "secular" teaching, as it is called, has, in most cases, gone by, the day of moral and religious teaching will never pass away until the world has grown very much better than it is at present; until there cease to be young lives that have to pass through the fiery ordeal of temptation; until in very truth "time shall serve eternity, and earth work out the designs of heaven."

Now, by "moral and religious teaching" I do not mean merely reading the *Bible* all round the class as an ordinary lesson; for I cannot but think that this practice, which is so general in the Orthodox schools and too often found in our own, can as a rule lead to little good, and often does a great deal of harm. The Bible ought not to be adopted as a mere standard reading-book, at any rate in the younger classes, with a word of explanation here and another there. Young children cannot understand it; nay, very often older heads are puzzled by some parts of it, and have at last to give up the problem of its meaning in despair.

If a book is to be adopted for class-reading let some simpler one be selected, adapted to the age and intelligence of the children -a book which, while it contains sound moral principles, they can readily understand and appreciate. In the *elder* classes the case of course is different. Those who are old enough to think for themselves will be able to find a meaning in parts of the Bible, which when younger they would never have dreamed of. But even in the elder classes I think the system of general Bible-reading is unwise, unless a judicious teacher is at the head of the class—one who will select suitable portions to be read, and be prepared to question and answer questions at any moment.

Then what is our "moral and religious teaching" to be? Well, the particular form of it depends entirely on the class of children you have to deal with. Does your school consist mainly of children drawn from the streets, ragged, rough, noisy? It will not do to adopt a text-book in such cases unless you have sufficient command over the children to keep their attention fixed and their hands still. The teaching requisite for such classes as these is perhaps the most difficult of all to give; for it should be almost entirely *viva voce*. It may be that you can read a story which will engage their attention and convey some sterling moral lesson to their minds; but even this plan has its disadvantages, and is often subjected to such abuse that it is used by the teacher as an easy way of putting time on, and it is better if possible to speak right out from the heart what you have to say. Ask a few questions of the children, and try to find some one thing which will fasten their attention and can be turned to good account by a few simple words from yourself. Picture lessons are often found to be a great source of attraction to children: their attention is at once arrested, and a discreet teacher will be able, by introducing sufficient variety, both to keep up that attention, and to convey a suitable lesson at the same time. The great object to be attained first of all is to get the children interested, and then a little skilful management will retain this state of mind, and enable you to convey a few moral or spiritual impressions which, though small in themselves, may have a potent influence on the future career of the children before you.

Or your classes may be composed of orderly, well-informed, shrewd children. It matters not whether they belong to the richer or the poorer class. Both are equal in the sight of God: both have life's battle to fight: both have the world's temptations to meet; and in the Sunday-school both should be treated as far as possible on the same level. The presence side by side of the two elements cannot fail to be a great advantage: it will expand and liberalize the thoughts of both. Lord Dufferin (I believe), used to send his children to the village national school at Clandeboye, where they sat on the same benches as the children of his tenantry. The influence of such enlightened policy must have been felt all round. I should like to see Lord Dufferin's example copied in our Sunday-schools. If your class is composed of the children of the rich and the poor; if on the same benches sit boys and girls drawn from the most diverse stations of life; if the monotony of one class of minds is varied by the introduction of others differently influenced, so much the better both for teachers and for taught. The rubbing together of elements so different will bring out the best qualities of each. and the teacher will have a much wider field for his work. A few simple words wisely dropped here and there—nay, even the very bearing of the teacher towards the class, will not be without effect. Generally, however, classes are not so formed; and more is the pity that they are not. But suppose you have tractable and intelligent scholars to deal with, you may find class-books serviceable to you, and most probably will. If you can get the children absorbed in the work before them, and keep up their attention and interest by continually asking questions and making leading remarks with the aim to elicit questions from the class, it may well be that this form of teaching is almost the best you can adopt. But I cannot help feeling that even here the words which come straight from the teacher's heart, and though not without preparation at home, are spoken without the help of a book, will often tell far more than the mere all-round reading and questioning. Let the teacher prepare as carefully as he can the lesson he intends to give; but, if possible, let it be spoken all, or nearly all, in the language that may suggest itself at the moment. It is not every S. S. teacher, however, who feels able for this rather difficult task, and in such cases the text-book is the best substitute, always provided that it is not a mere reading lesson which is given. A wise teacher will, however, be quick to discern the best method to adopt, in order to secure the attention and promote the real interests of the scholars, and an hour's talk with the class will do far more to set him on the right track than any amount of lecturing and advice from one who stands outside.

When I called your attention to the fact that one great aim of the founders of the S. S. was to rescue the outcast and the forsaken from their degradation, I remarked that *on this line* it seemed to me lay the most important function of the S. S. of the present day. Now by this I don't mean that we are to confine our attention simply or mainly to the *elevation of the degraded*; but we are here pointed to the kind of influence which we ought to exercise, and the chief end we ought to keep in view. We can follow *on the same line* without pulling up exactly where our predecessors stopped. By all means let us continue their work, and devote heart and soul to the accomplishment of it; but let us go further and deeper. Need we wait for the degradation to come ere we set to work? Are we bound only to make ours a work of *reform*? Cannot we step in a little earlier and try to stop the cause of the evils? If we can do this there will be less reforming work to do. If we do not succeed all round, (and we may be certain we shall not), we can still apply ourselves with unabated godly zeal to the work of uplifting from the mire. We have surely not only a work of rescuing and reproving before us, but a still grander one of educating and preventing. If we can only be beforehand, and get the start of the evil at work, we may perchance set in a right direction a nature which would otherwise go wrong; we may influence for good, where

else there would soon be an influence for harm at work; and so we may be the means of directing the course of a life into a pure and trusty channel. This, it seems to me, is the real and essential province of the Sunday-school now. The changed circumstances of our age have changed the current of Sunday-school energy, and, it seems to me, that the main direction it must take now is towards religious education. What the Church is to us the Sunday-school should be to the child. As our association together for worship helps to strengthen us for conflict with temptation and trouble, so the Sunday-school should aim to bias the child (I am not afraid of that word bias), towards a virtuous and Godly life. It can take the child in his earliest years of intelligence, and surround him by holy influences and beautiful thoughts, and by pre-occupying the mind, prevent the encroachments of an invader which would bring probable destruction and certain taint to his fresh young spirit. The child's soul looking out into the world with its wide-opened eyes of wonder can be largely moulded into form by the influences which surround it and the forces which are brought to bear upon it. How necessary is it, then, that such influences should be holy ones, that such forces should be the promoters of a staunch moral strength! "As the twig is bent the tree's inclined," says an old proverb; and we in our S. S. ought to gather up the truth of the adage and apply it to real advantage. We may be very certain that if good agencies are not employed, bad ones will be; and the soul, which, as it grows, must drink in nourishment of some kind, will probably take it from the nearest and easiest source. If the nourishment is not of the best, so much the worse for the soul; and the result will be a withering of its beauty, and a dwarfing of its moral stature. But if we can supply it with clear waters of truth and virtue, which will give it day by day fresh grace and strength and stateliness—are we not to blame if we withhold such agencies, and prefer to bide our time till the poisonous influences have effected their work, and provided us with too ample scope for the exercise of our skill and energy in reform and rescue. Is it better, let us think, to send out incompetent ambassadors and then rectify their blunders as well as we can, or to take the preliminary precaution of ascertaining that the character of our emissaries is such that we may safely trust them not to make such blunders at all? Is it better to return to power a government which trifles with morals, encourages dishonesty, and lands the country in needless and wicked wars, and trust to the next to repair the damages it has done, or to work with might and main whenever the issue is before the country, to put at the head of the state a body of honest, true, God-fearing men, whose best aim it is to benefit their fellow creatures? Is it wiser to punish the drunkard for his offence against society, or, as far as we can, to keep him from getting drunk? Is it not better to prevent than to cure disease? And should we not educate the young soul into habits of holy thought and virtuous action, in preference to waiting till it has been evilly affected by some noxious agency, and then setting all our powers to work to restore the original sanctity of the God-given nature?

This, I think, is the kind of work which the Sunday-school, above all places, is eminently fitted to do. It is a work at once "moral and religious:" it will promote the love of man to man, and of man to God. It will pierce the soul with living power, and bring into broad daylight the immortal fact of conscience. It will force the recognition of a higher law, which transcends all time and space, and is valid and immutable eternally. It will fit up the untried nature with armour meet for the defence of its stronghold of innocence. It will usher him into the battlefield, and nerve him with strength to overcome, while he fights under the banner of Right and God. Nay, more, it will fill the soul with a deepening consciousness of its kinship with the soul of the universe; bring God down to man, and take man up to God; and bind an imperishable tie between earth and heaven.

Is not this a noble work which any loving nature might be glad and proud to share in? It may seem a hard task when viewed from the outside; but I venture to say if the experiment is tried by one who will give his or her heart to the work, it will be found not such a Herculean task after all. S. S. teaching cannot be too simple, provided it is good and natural.

But it is a serious and solemn work. Who can reflect unmoved that each child represents a fresh young life with an unknown future before it? That future will largely be determined by early influences; and the simple Sunday-school lessons may perchance be the means of guiding a nature into the right channel, where it would otherwise have gone wrong, and perhaps, not only have wasted its current, but swept away along with it the stored treasures of many a harvest and the untold wealth of a forest-growth. A word in season often has a great effect: how much more so the judicious practical lessons taught Sunday after Sunday in the School!

To help this work then I invite all the brave and true-hearted. The harvest is great and the labourers are few. The task is not so arduous as might at first glance seem. The responsibility which lies on the S. S. teacher, it is true, is great; but a heavier responsibility is the lot of those who choose to stand idly by while the great religious work of life is moving slowly on. We may not all become S. S. teachers; but there is not one of us, from the least to the greatest, who can find no labour to be done in the Lord's service; and what work can be grander and sublimer than that of influencing for good the young life of our beloved country to whom the future will be committed? Come then, ye that are blessed by the Christian spirit; come ye that are zealous in the cause of holiness; come, ye that would show your love to God and to fellow-men, and help to build in this glorious land of our birth temples meet for the Most High, and to raise up the shrines in which He most delights—the clean hand, the pure heart, and the aspiring soul.

BOOK NOTICES.

Laws of Life, after the mind of Christ. By JOHN HAMILTON THOM. Kegan, Paul & Co., London: 1883.

WE hail with unqualified satisfaction this new volume of Discourses from the elegant pen of John Hamilton Thom. It is a book full of mature wisdom, and of rich spiritual insight. Mr. Thom's friends were anxious that he should speak to them and to the world once again, and, at the Liverpool Conference, a few of them drew up a memorial to him asking him to publish a volume of his Sermons and Prayers. In this new book he has complied with the first portion of their request, but he has felt that he could not invade the sacred region of prayer and comply with the other portion of the request. We may regret his decision, but we cannot help feeling that it is quite in harmony with the quiet sanctities of Mr. Thom's life. But the Discourses are of priceless value and will take their place with those of Martineau, Parker, Channing, Robertson, and Stanley. There is in them, besides their clear, logical power and precision, a sweetness of tone and elevation of thought which exercise a purifying influence over the mind and

raise the reader into a lofty region of religious purity. These Discourses will not be readily laid aside but will be frequently conned, and placed near at hand for constant reference. The book forms a splendid New-Year's Gift to any one who is thoughtful and devout. It is a rich aid to religious life.

The volume is published at 7/-, but may be had at the Depository, Queen's Arcade, for 6/3.

SELECTIONS.

ALONE WITH CONSCIENCE.

I sat alone with my conscience,
In a place where time had ceased;
And we talked of my former living
In the land where the years increased.
And I felt I should have to answer
The question it put to me,
And to face the answer and question
Throughout an eternity.

The ghosts of forgotten actions
Came floating before my sight,
And things that I thought were dead things
Were alive with a terrible might;
And the vision of all my past life
Was an awful thing to face,
Alone with my conscience sitting
In that solemnly silent place.

And I thought of a far-away warning
Of a sorrow that was to be mine,
In a land that then was the future,
But now was the present time;
And I thought of my former thinking
Of a judgment-day to be;
But sitting alone with my conscience
Seemed judgment enough for me.

And I wondered if there was a future
To this land beyond the grave;
But no one gave me an answer,
And no one came to save.
Then I felt that the future was present,
And the present would never go by;
For it was but the thought of my past life
Grown into eternity.

Then I woke from my timely dreaming,
And the vision passed away,
And I knew the far-away warning
Was a warning of yesterday;
And I pray that I may not forget it,
In this land before the grave,
That I may not cry in the future,
And no one come to save.

And so I have learned a lesson,
Which I ought to have learned before,
And which, though I learned it dreaming,
I hope to forget no more.
So I sit alone with my conscience,
In the place where the years increase;
And I try to remember the future;
In the land where time will cease.
And I know of the future judgment,
How dreadful soe'er it be,
That to sit alone with my conscience
Will be judgment enough for me.

Spectator.

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